

# Filling in the Blanks: Public Opinion about the Use of Administrative Records to Obtain Missing Information for the Decennial Census

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# Background

# What are administrative records?

- **Administrative record** = data from government and commercial sources used for providing programs/services, such as:
  - Tax Return data from Internal Revenue Service (IRS),
  - Address data from United States Postal Service (USPS)
  - Phone numbers and other contact information from telephone service providers

# Why administrative records for census?

- In 2010, 28% of households did not respond initially to the census and required costly in-person follow-up
- Since then, Census Bureau has been evaluating the possibility of expanded use of administrative records
  - Plan for record use in 2020 has evolved since we began data collection in 2013
- Likely record uses for 2020 Census Operations:
  - Occupied/vacant status (to determine NRFU)
  - Address updating (used in prior censuses)
  - Targeting advertising/communication

# Research Questions

- Do people favor or oppose the use of administrative records to obtain census information?
- Do people view the use of administrative records for decennial enumeration as a violation of privacy?
- Does it matter what type of information is gathered from records (vacant status, household count, name and DOB)?
- How do privacy perceptions of administrative record use compare to current practice of proxy (neighbor) interviews?

# Methodology

# Survey Methodology

- Gallup Nightly Survey
  - ≈121 responses daily
  - Subsample of National RDD Sample
  - Landline and Cellphone
  - AAPOR Response Rate 3 = 8-11%
- Goal: Understand public trust in federal statistical system and factors that predict trust
- Data collection: Various items collected at different times from 2012 to present (ongoing)
- Not intended for precise point estimates (mainly group differences and trends)

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GALLUP

# Survey Items

- “If your household did not return a census form in 2020, do you feel it would or would not be an invasion of your privacy to use information from other government agencies, such as the Social Security Administration, to find out...”
  - “IF ANYONE was living at your address?”
  - “HOW MANY people were living at your address?”
  - “NAMES AND AGES of the people living at your address?”

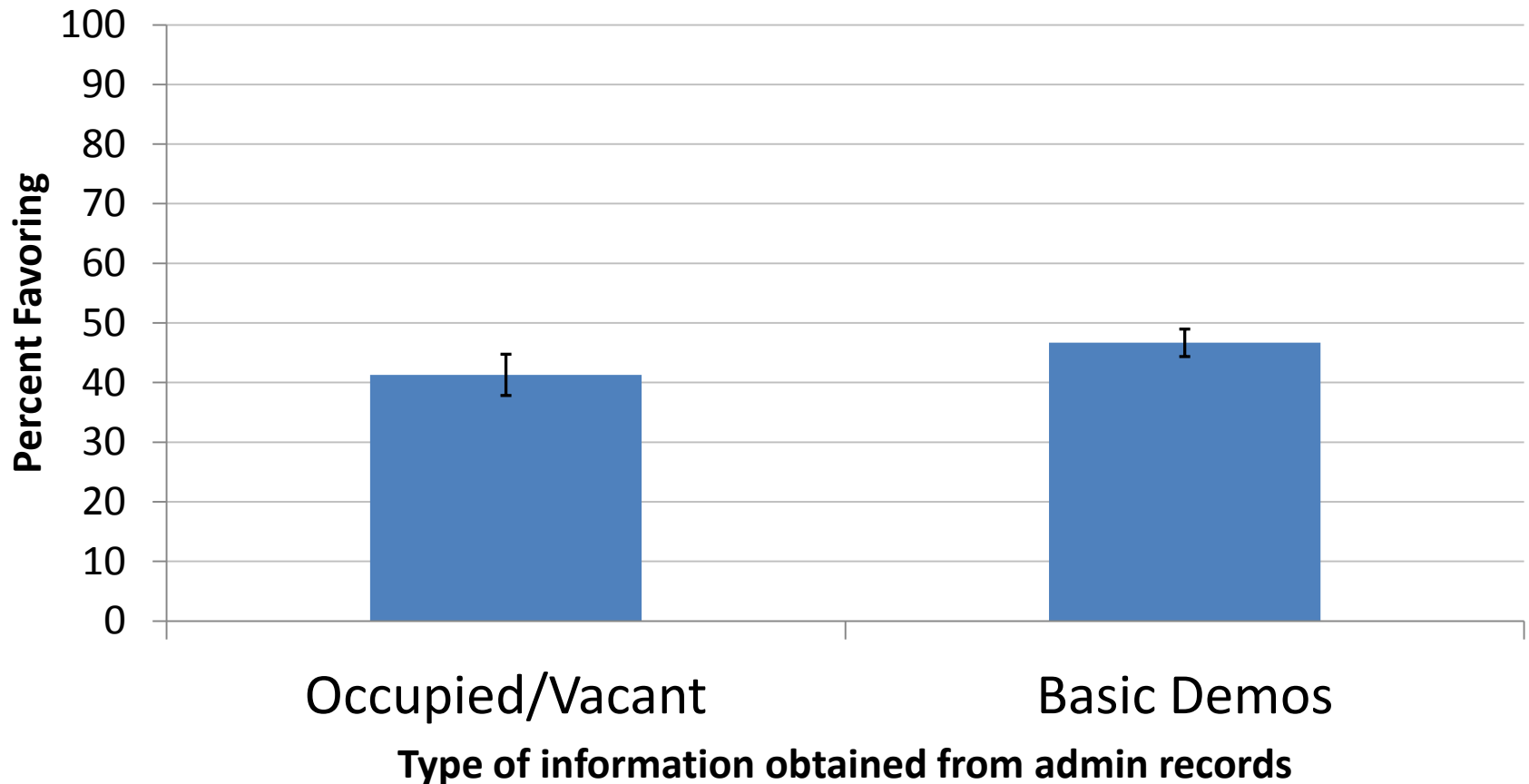


# Survey Items

- Also asked about:
  - Favor/oppose use of admin records to obtain census information
  - Privacy perceptions of using administrative records **INSTEAD** of mailing a census form
  - Privacy perceptions of getting information from **NEIGHBORS**
  - Whether it is more respectful of privacy to use records or ask neighbors for non-response

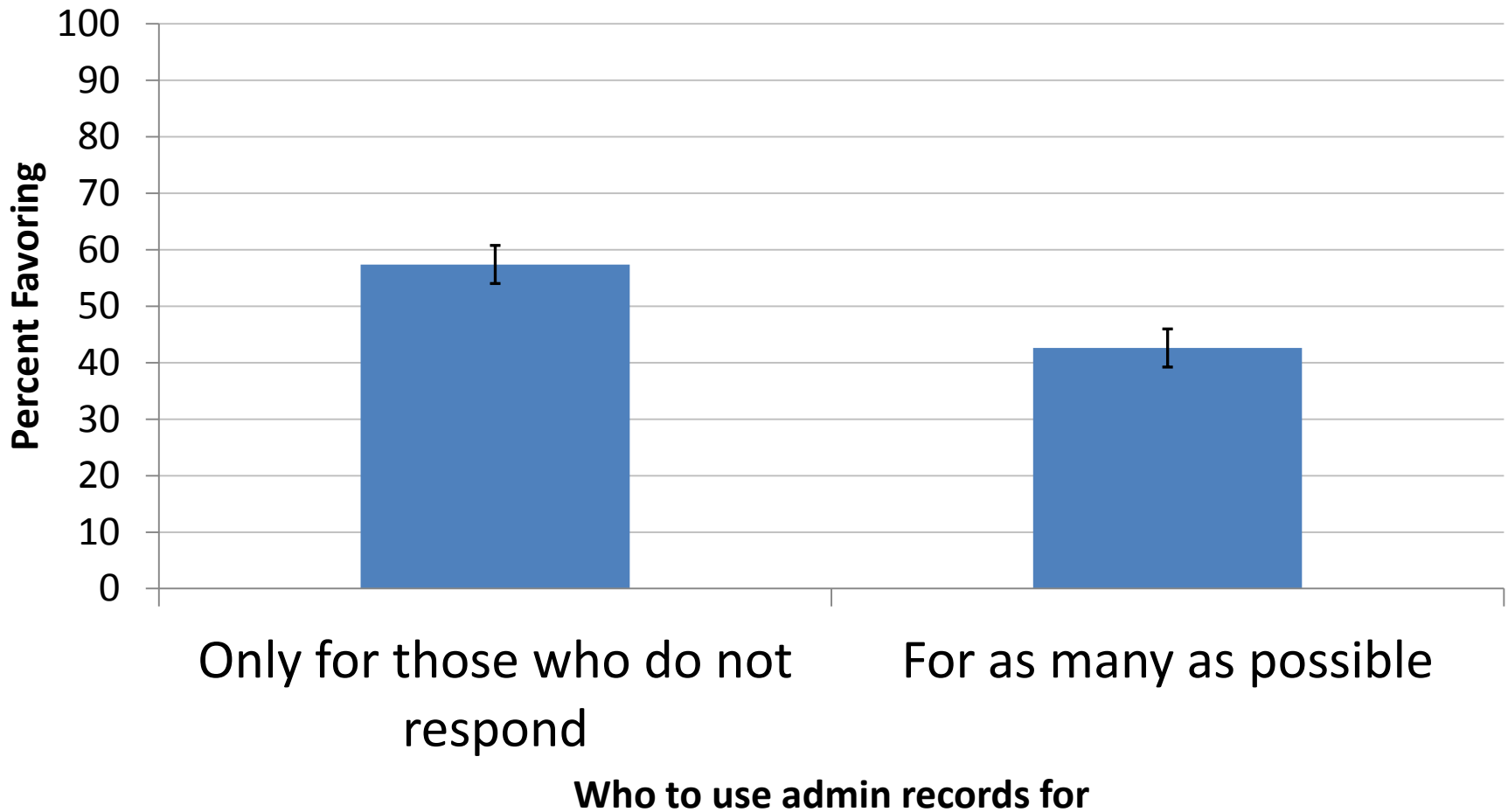
# Results

# Favoring Use of Administrative Records for Occupied/Vacant and Basic Demographics



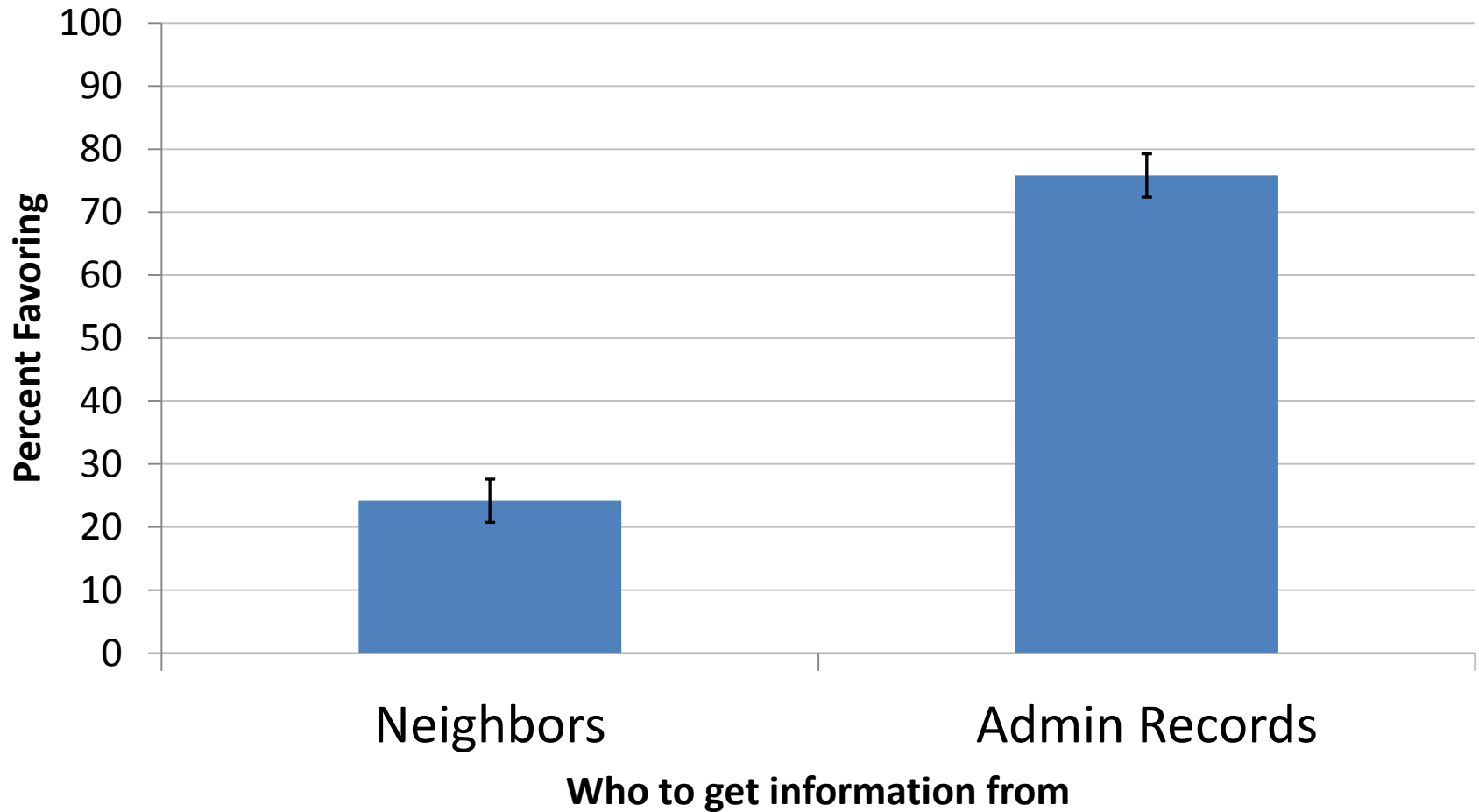
Source: Gallup Daily Tracking Survey, Sept. 2013-Oct. 2013. Not intended for point estimates

# To Save Money, Who Should Census Use Administrative Records for?



Source: Gallup Daily Tracking Survey, Sept. 2013-Oct. 2013. Not intended for point estimates

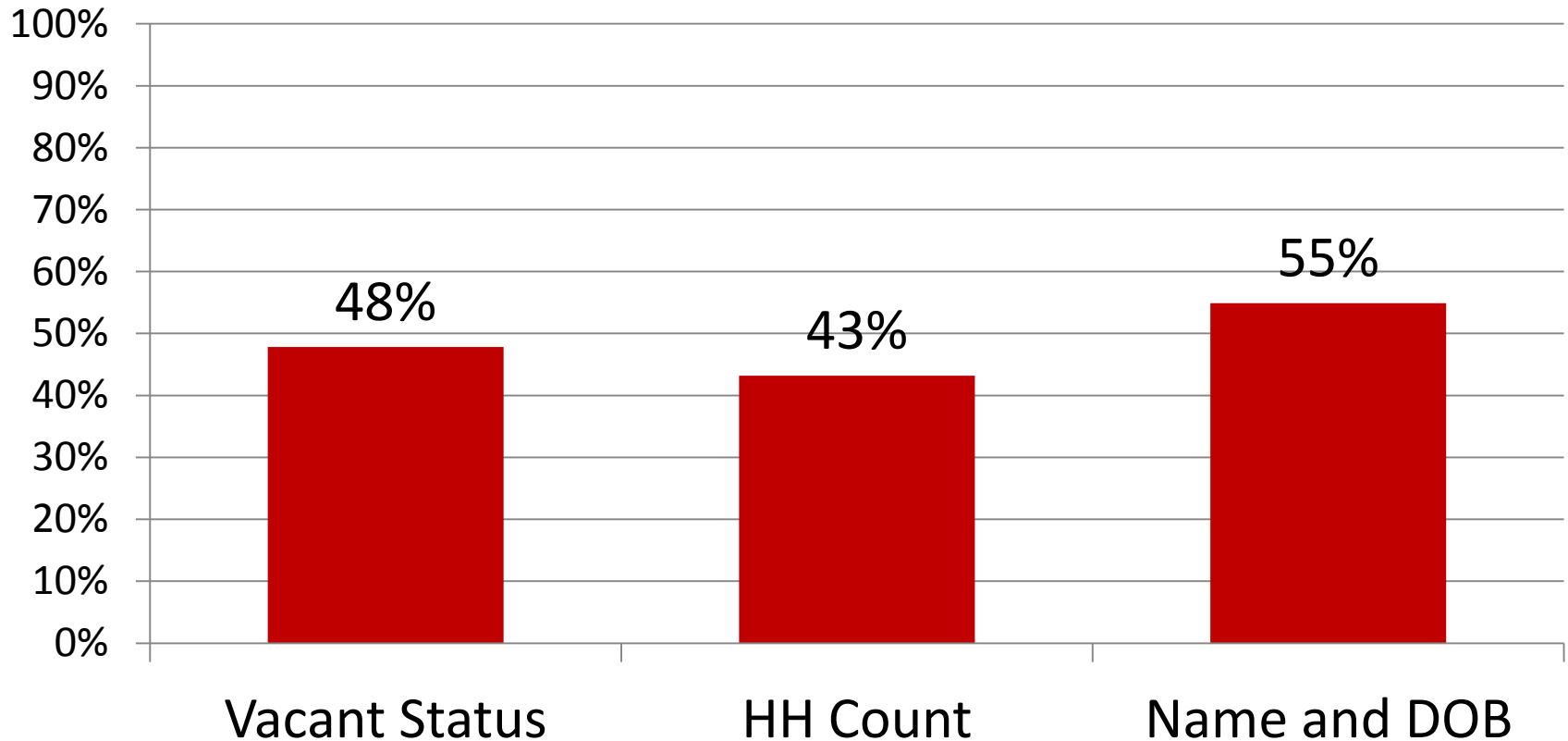
# For Non-Responders, Should Census Go to Neighbors or Records?



Source: Gallup Daily Tracking Survey, Sept. 2013-Oct. 2013. Not intended for point estimates

# Privacy Perceptions

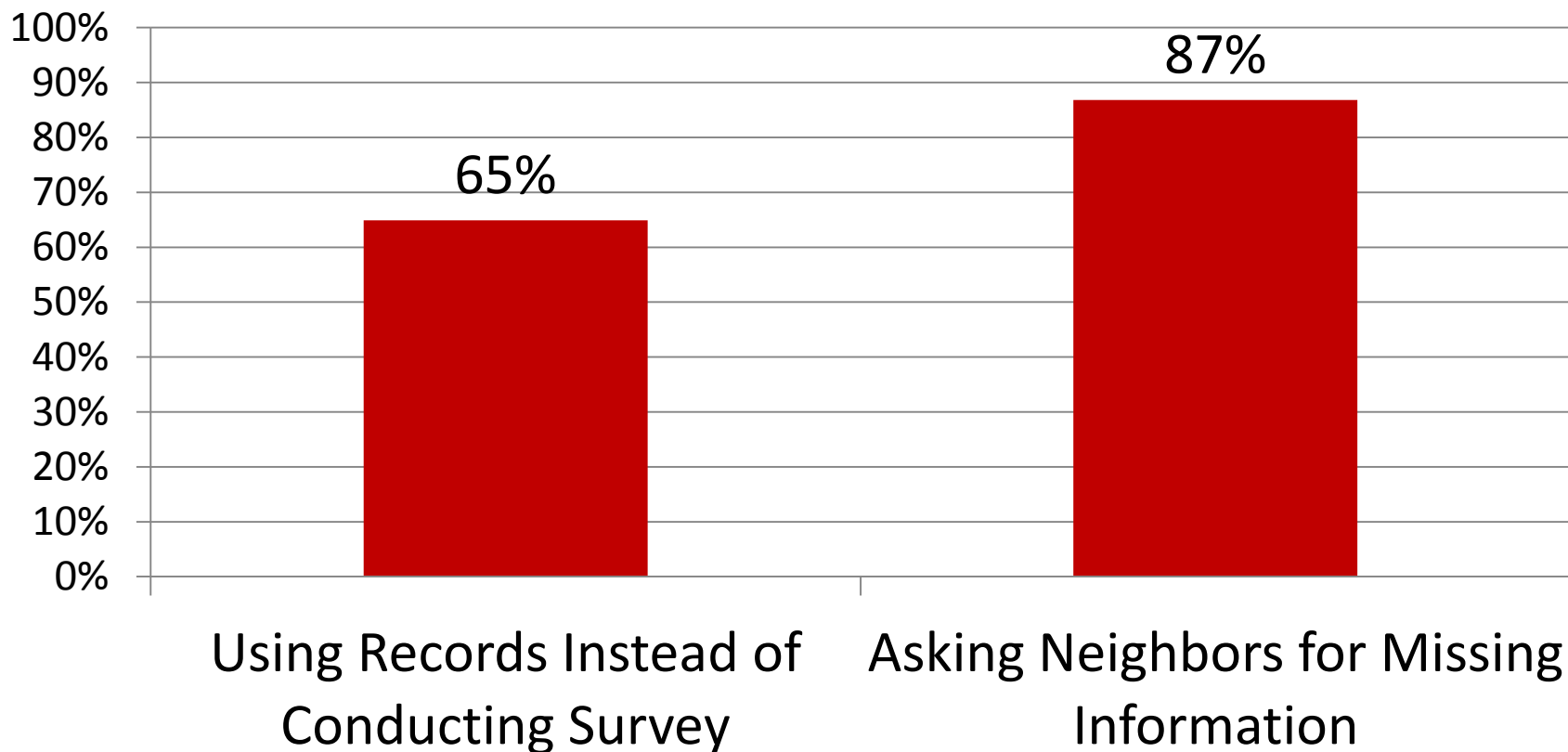
## Percent who view it as an invasion



Source: Gallup Daily Tracking Survey, Sept. 2016-Nov. 2016. Not intended for point estimates

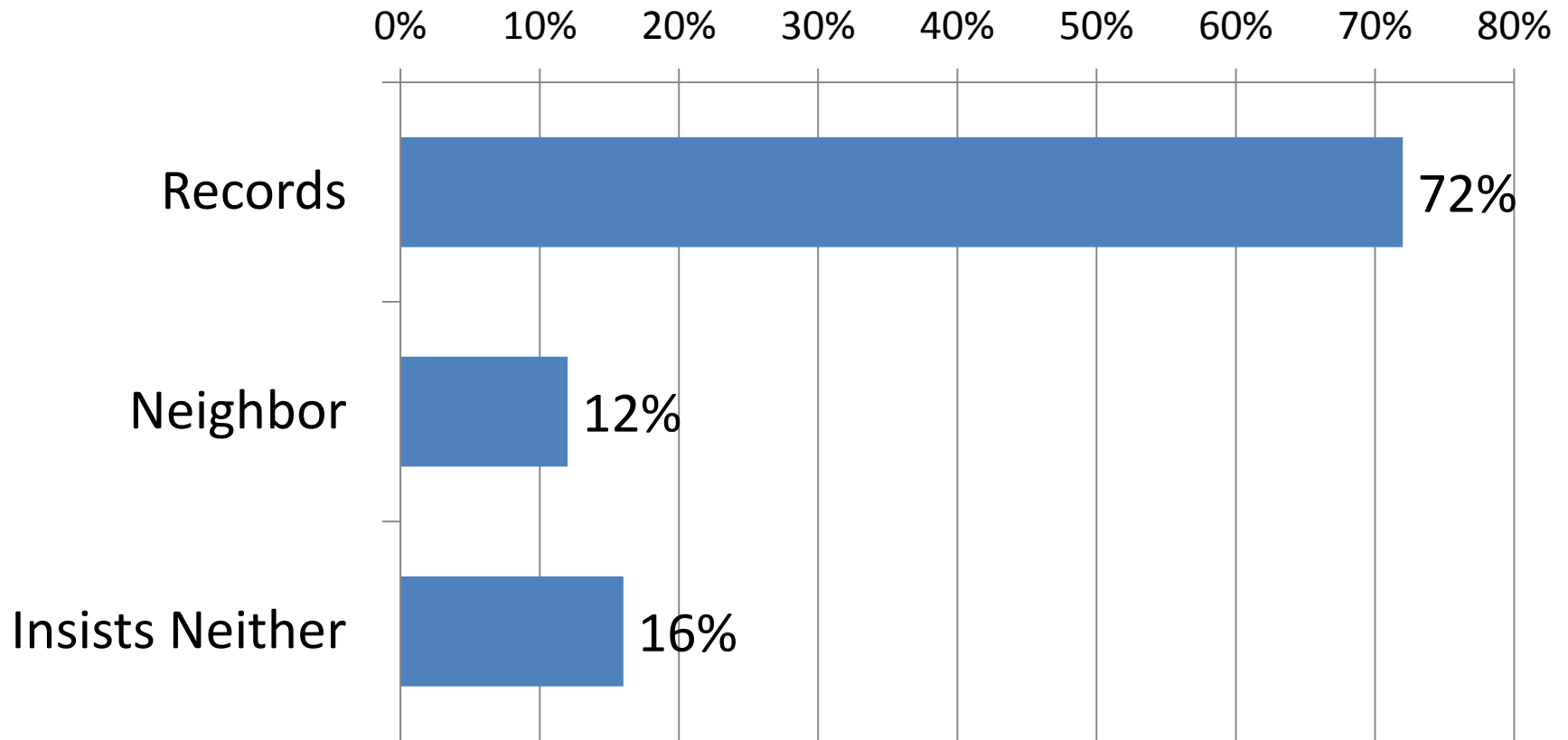
# Privacy Perceptions

## Percent who view it as an invasion



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# More respectful - Neighbor or Admin Record?



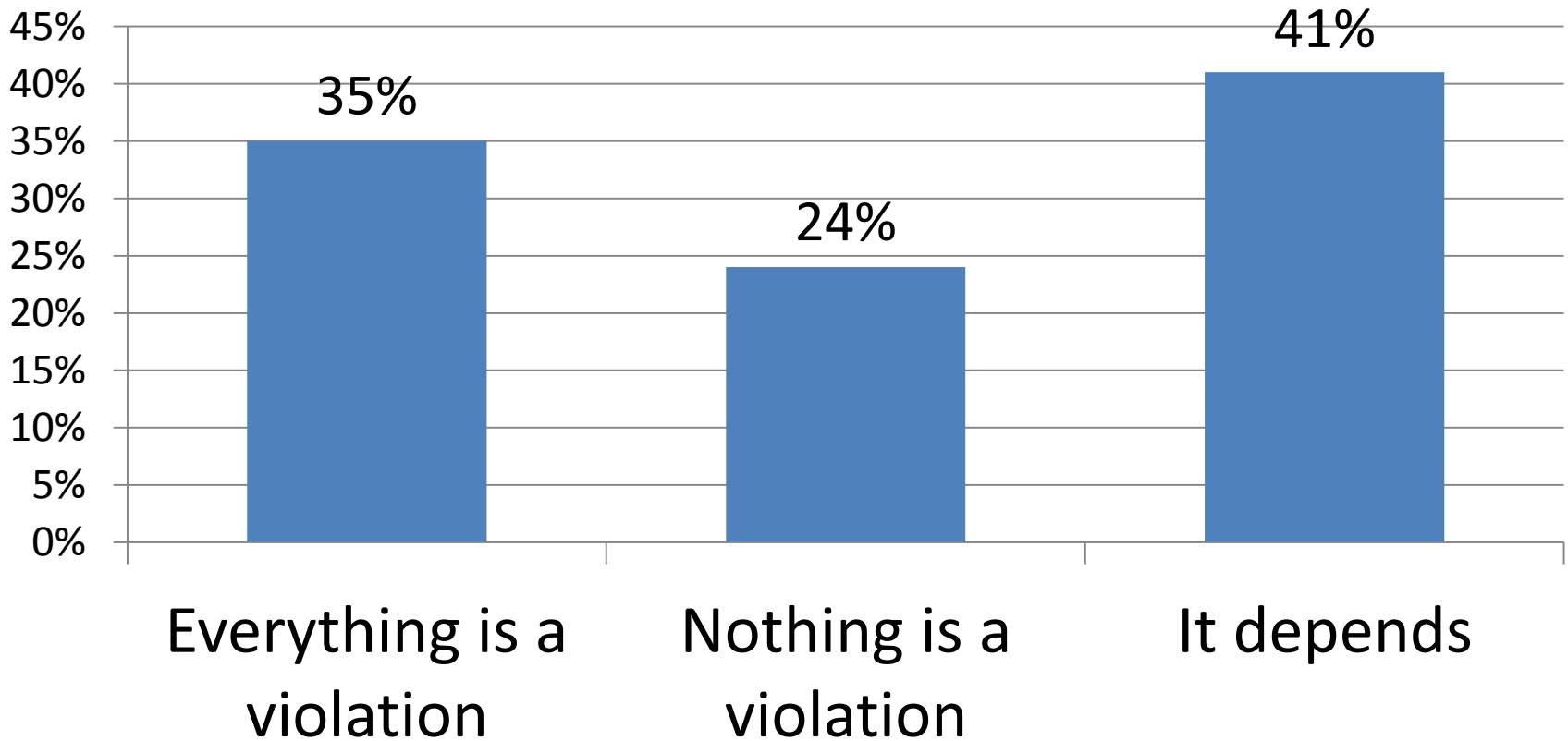
Source: Gallup Daily Tracking Survey, Sept. 2016-Nov. 2016. Not intended for point estimates



# What predicts privacy perceptions?

- ATTITUDES! Especially trust in federal statistics and belief that they respect privacy
- A few item-specific predictors:
  - Non-White respondents see vacant status as a privacy violation more often
  - Oldest respondents see less privacy concerns with household size and name/DOB
  - Men less likely to view it as a privacy violation to replace survey with records or to ask neighbor

# Straightlining vs. Changing Opinions



Source: Gallup Daily Tracking Survey, Sept. 2016-Nov. 2016. Not intended for point estimates

# Who changes opinions?

- Differences on trust and attitude questions were the best predictor – moderate views predicted nuanced attitudes about admin record use
- In terms of demographic characteristics, those who viewed all record use as a violation and those who changed opinions were similar:
  - Non-white respondents
  - Least educated (high school or less)
  - Lower income categories
  - Younger and older (as opposed to middle age group 44-65)

# Why Are Some Respondents Against the Use Of Records?

- Regardless of record source, many respondents cited:
  - Privacy/Confidentiality
  - Don't trust the government/Government is too big
- For respondents who mention privacy or trust, most indicated either:
  - Government has too much info about them
  - Concern about an unauthorized person gaining access to their information (e.g., government's ability to protect data)



# Overview of Other Findings Related to Administrative Records Use

- Many assume that government agencies already share identification data, such as name, address, and date of birth (whether or not they approve of it).
- Majority of respondents are ok with the idea of the government combining data across agencies, but a sizeable minority are not.
- Respondents are more likely to be comfortable with the government combining and sharing data if there is third-party oversight.

# Overview of Other Findings Related to Administrative Records Use

- Framing matters – When respondents understand that using administrative data will save taxpayer money, save them time or effort, or help contribute to a quality census (that can have a positive impact on their community,) they are more likely to favor their use.
  - Respondents are less convinced by the need to combine government data to inform policy makers

# Conclusion

# Summary

- Many respondents see admin record use as a violation of privacy (43% for least invasive)
  - Even more (87%) view neighbor proxy interviews as a violation of privacy
- 41% of respondents had variable privacy perceptions depending on specific record use factors
- Trust in federal statistics is key to predicting favorability toward administrative record use, privacy perceptions, and predicting opinion change across record use cases
- Demographic factors were associated with privacy perceptions but mostly became insignificant when controlling for attitudes



# Implications & Future Research

- Privacy concerns are an important potential factor in public response to administrative record use for the 2020 Census.
- Future research goals include (1) follow up with open-ended data about specific privacy concerns, (2) develop respondent messaging that explains admin record use while alleviating privacy concerns, (3) identify general ways to improve trust in the federal statistical system.

# References

- U.S. Census Bureau (2009) Administrative Records Handbook.
- Keller & Konicki (2016). Using 2010 Census Coverage Measurement Results to Better Understand Possible Administrative Records Incorporation in the Decennial Census. Presented at the Joint Statistical Meetings.

# Questions or comments?

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